

"MOONSHINE, WALL, AND LOVERS TWAIN"

By MARGARET BUSBEE SHIPP



ENELOPE had been ten entire days with her sister before her enthusiasms found an outlet. "Anna, you're an ideal housekeeper. Brillat-Savarin would unfold his napkin with a gleeful chuckle over your dinners, and a dodo in your kitchen would be no more surprising than the 'common housefly.'"

"After that polite preface, I know you're going to insult me, Pensy," returned her sister, smiling. "I'm wondering where the blow will fall."

"On your back yard," Penelope pronounced sentence, "on the unmitigated disgrace of this unspeakable back yard."

"I have always thought the cook kept it quite neat out here," Anna demurred, looking round her in mild surprise. A stretch of bare earth, swept daily, a clothesline, a lone tree, and a disused croquet ground confronted her.

"Not a shrub, not a vine, not a blossom," Penelope insisted. "You've a nice lawn in front; but here at the rear is the abomination of desolation where there should be the soul of a home, your retiring ground, your pavilion 'from the strife of tongues.'"

"Good gracious, Pensy! One would think I was living in a nest of magpies instead of having a dear old lady across the street and a recluse on the other side. I'll turn the yard over to you, Child; but I warn you that gardening is an expensive fad."

"If I had but two loaves of bread in the world, I should sell one of them and buy narcissi to feed my soul." Don't groan, Anna, and say that you've read that in every Gardening Number this spring. It always makes me feel as if I must stretch out a hand across the centuries to grasp Mahomet's lean brown one and give it a good American shake."

They were strolling near the stone wall, and Penelope's clear voice might have been heard on the other side. The wall with its ivy crown was over six feet high, so that no one could see over it on tiptoe.

Penelope had spent the winter since she left college with her brother in New York, pursuing her music and reveling in the theater. Her half-sister, Anna Reade, was many years older than she, and gave almost a maternal tenderness to the young girl. Reade's business required his coming South to live, in one of those pleasant, hospitable places, just between a city and a town.

YOU never knew such kindness as has been shown us, Pensy," Anna went on to say. "Everybody has been so neighborly, the only exception being the man who lives next door. He is Mr. Lawrence, the illustrator, and he spends nearly half the year here in the old home he inherited from his grandparents. He has the reputation of being very reserved."

Penelope had hardly heard a word after the name. "John Peyton Lawrence!" she gasped. "Next door! Somehow, I've never thought of him as an actual human being who could fuss if his coffee was cold."

"Why, what do you know of him?"

"His work, and that is enough to know. All the years I was at college I had his pictures on my wall. I simply loathe those narrow-eyed women with gorgeous gowns and men kissing their necks!" Penelope declared with more force than grace. "But the Lawrence girls are the kind I love: strong and lithe, beautiful and well bred; not ornaments nor intoxicants, but splendid, natural, wholesome women! Sunshine and dew and outdoors and the old faiths are in their makeup."

Anna gave her customary, "Good gracious, Pensy!" and added after a moment's thought, "Though I've never met Mr. Lawrence, I will say this for him—he doesn't raise chickens. My other neighbor does, and they scratch up my lawn."

WHEN Reade came home one afternoon he found bags of bone meal and kegs of lime in the freshly plowed back yard, and old Uncle Isum with his tools. Isum preached on Sundays, and was held in great repute by his colored brethren; but on week days he pursued the avocation of gardener.

The scene of Penelope's activities was graced by a new bench under the lone tree. Anna sat there darning placidly, while Penelope dissected a seed catalogue.

"It's the right time to plant sweet peas, isn't it?" she asked her brother in law. "I've marked ever so many shades, because they look like bright, varicolored butterflies, and I do love them."

"Pearl blush, peppered with carmine dots, wings

pink," Walter read from the catalogue. "Rather an unusual butterfly; an entomologist would delight in it."

"I never turn the pages of the catalogue of a department store without thinking how many things there are in the world that I don't want," Penelope reflected. "Accordions, perfumery, rope portières, parlor suites, and parrot cages! But with a seed catalogue it's hard to make a choice, when the known is so delectable and the unknown so inviting."

If a person happened to have a special aversion to perfumes and caged birds, it would be difficult for him to overhear this statement without giving an approving nod; and then perhaps going back to his work to prove to himself that he wasn't eavesdropping.

"The catalogue says London Pride comes from Russia. That sounds like an international marriage; so I must have it. Then I have on my list African golden-orange daisy, Japanese kudzu vine, Siberian edelweiss, Brazilian morning-glory, English daisies, Persian cyclamen, and Abyssinian amaranthus," exclaimed Penelope.

"It suggests a lesson in geography," said Reade.

"Just think, Walter, the floral treasures of the whole world can be brought to your back door as readily as your groceries! We'll have a sweep of lawn in the center, with a border of flowers against that wall. I want it covered with a background of vines, with tall hollyhocks and foxgloves holding up spikes of bloom against the green."

A kindly listener might sigh over the inexperience that believed that foxgloves and hollyhocks were going to flower from seed their first season.

Old Isum, after a day under Penelope's energetic management, had gaged her in the wonderfully intuitive way that is characteristic of his race. He paused a moment in his spading to grumble, "Dar you go ag'in, Miss Pensy, allus seein' flowers up in de air 'fore dey's good in de groun'."

"And a blessed temperament it is!" thought the man who overheard.

A FEW days after this the same man, peacefully sketching on his own premises, might feel that he had a right to resent being disturbed by the chatter on the other side of the wall.

"Walter told me you made a raid on the woods before breakfast. What is that tiny vine, Pensy?"

"A tangle of leafage," was flung back merrily. "There, Anna, stop counting its three leaves! Men speak of 'December cotton' before a boll is formed; they talk of a railroad as soon as they begin to quarrel over the right of way; they elect the treasurer of a company before it has a stockholder. Why should my poor quinquefolia be the only thing under the skies without a future? If you 'dip into the future as far as human eye can see,' you can fancy this vine rioting over the entire back porch."

The listener felt sure of the rejoinder, which promptly came, "Good gracious, Pensy!" Then after a moment, "Isn't that a maidenhair fern?"

"Yes; but when I think of the shaded stream by

"Dar You Go Ag'in, Allus
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in De Groun'!"



which it grew my watering pot seems a banal compensation. The little drooping thing seems to be asking, 'If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange and be all to me?'"

"Do you think this embroidery silk matches?" asked the placid voice. "Dear child, are those more seeds?"

"Yes, treasures and treasures," gloatingly, "enough for a regular Grandmother's Garden, such as I've read about in books but never seen! Oh, Anna, we walled-in city girls lose so much!"

"We walk better, anyway," returned the other tranquilly. "There isn't a girl in this place with your carriage, Pensy."

"Sweet alyssum, forget-me-nots, columbines, poppies, petunias, phlox, nasturtiums, asters, cornflowers, pansies!" catalogued the happy voice in crescendo. "Think of the bewilderment of bloom!"

City girl indeed, who thought she could sow pansy seed the first of April in the South, and have a bewilderment of bloom! Well conducted pansy seeds had been put into the ground last August, and were even now blooming with serene dignity. There was no reason to change one's seat and stop sketching so long as the conversation over the garden wall was entirely floral; but after an interlude of silence there was a sudden change of topic.

"Anna, I can't help thinking about John Lawrence being next door. Do you suppose he ever walks in his garden?"

"Certainly not." Anna was quite positive about it. "A bachelor's back yard never contains anything but ashpiles and a garbage can, especially if he's an artist. All artists have slovenly ways. I can never be thankful enough that Walter is in wholesale drugs. It is such a clean, neat business."

"Indeed it is, Dear." There was a hint of tender amusement in Penelope's voice. "I'm glad the Lawrence place has such a great big yard and so many trees in front, so that I can't get a glimpse of him by chance," she continued. "If he smirked, if he wore pale lavender ties, if he twirled his mustache, if he led a dog by a chain, I could never again love his pictures so dearly."

A clean-shaved man in a blue tie, glancing at his collie stretched at ease, might have heard the bill of indictment, of whose counts he was guiltless, with the thought, "If my face doesn't wear a smirk now, it never will!"

There was nothing possible but to move. The atmospheric conditions were exactly right for his work; but

in common decency he could not go on with it if he was to be made the subject of discussion. He rose, wiping his brushes; but as he started to move off he was petrified to hear:

"Certainly if he does any of those things I sha'n't trust him with James Lee's wife."

Sheer amazement made him pause. Even Anna was aroused.

"Who on earth is she, Pency?"

"Don't you remember Browning's poem? Always I've wanted John Lawrence to paint her, and Maggie Tulliver, and Jane Eyre, and the Grammarian—"

"Lindley Murray?"

"No, Browning's again; the one who had a funeral—I don't know his name."

"If you don't even know his name and there is no authentic portrait of him, I don't see how Mr. Lawrence could get a good likeness."

"You're quite right, Dear, as you always are," Pency laughed.

As a man's work for the morning was brought to a standstill, there was leisure to go into one's library, take down a certain volume, and hunt up two poems.

SURELY on Sunday afternoon one might expect to be at ease under his own vine and fig tree, and free from neighbors with a propensity to garden. Lawrence groaned when he heard a snatch of song. Perhaps the groan deceived himself; but even the intelligent collie must have seen the dawn of interest and expectancy in his master's face. But this time Penelope did not talk: she only hummed low snatches of song in the preoccupied way that showed she was working.

"Goodness, Pency! what are you doing? Sowing seed on Sunday!" Anna was properly scandalized, and Lawrence chuckled with amusement:

"The young pagan!"

"You didn't half listen to the sermon, Anna," Penelope reproved. "The minister said we were all too apt to confound duty with whatever was disagreeable, making life needlessly uncomfortable to ourselves and to others; that to the harmonious mind, instincts and impulses were given as guides. Now, my natural, human impulse is to put these seeds in my nicely pulverized ground before those clouds develop into rain."

"I'm sure," said Anna solemnly, "that he would be amazed at your interpretation of his words."

"I'm equally sure," retorted Penelope, "that instead of writing letters, a habit that has darkened Sunday afternoons for years, that good man would approve that I spend it outdoors, mothering these blessed little seeds."

Whatever the minister might have thought of Penelope's conduct, Uncle Isum was outraged. When he came back to work Monday morning he pointed an accusing finger at the pansy bed.

"Miss Pency, yer put dese in de groun' yistiddy. Dey'll nebbah come up. De lan' shall be as brass an' iron. Yassum, dat's what hit says in de Good Book, as brass an' iron."

"Well, do your best with it while I'm away, Isum. It will be two weeks before I'm here again."

"I shall miss you so, Pency!" lamented her sister. "Wherever you go, a nearby college mate rises up to claim a visit."

SILENCE in the neighboring garden for a fortnight, —no happy chatter, no ripples of laughter, no trills of song. Truly an admirable time in which a man might work, instead of falling into long dreaming spells and letting his cigar go out.

He was smoking in his garden one evening when he heard a stealthy shuffle on the other side of the wall. Swinging himself up into a tree, he had a view of the intruder, himself unperceived.

It was Isum, and he was deliberately raking over the soil where the pansy seeds had been planted. He was too jealous of his reputation as prophet to permit any seed to germinate in the accursed bed.

"The old renegade!" Lawrence muttered. A happy thought came to him. The girl was absolutely ignorant of the rudiments of gardening. He might transplant a whole bed of pansies to her garden, and she would think they had come up in her absence. After Isum had taken his departure, Lawrence climbed by the roots of ivy over the wall, bringing a basket of pansy plants, well set in buds.

He was in rapt when Penelope came back; for she ran into the garden before she had taken off her hat, and went into ecstasies of triumph over her pansies. When Isum saw them he was appalled.

"Dem panzers is Marse Debbil's work. Dat lan' was brass an' iron, an' de onliest pussan dat could make dem plants sprout outen de groun' dat way is Marse Debbil hisself. I see hoof tracks 'bout dat baid; he jes' kiver up his hoofs wid store shoes ter fool yuh. No, Ma'am, Miss Pency, I ain't nebbah gwine ter tech dat baid."

"I wish the things you planted would flourish as well. Nothing else is up except a few nasturtiums and sweet peas. I did so hope that border of spice pinks would be showing! If you are afraid of the pansy bed, you may attend to the rest of the garden, and I'll look after it."

ENGAGEMENTS during the next afternoon and evening made her forget it; but after she had gone upstairs she remembered the thirsty little plants. She slipped downstairs and out into the garden, her watering pot in hand. There, with his back turned to her, a tall figure bent over her flowerbed, intent on she knew not what evil to her plants. He did not hear her light footsteps, until suddenly a cold nozzle was thrust against his neck and a stern young voice demanded:

"If you do not tell me what mischief you are about, I'll pour every drop of this water on you!"

"You may see for yourself," he answered meekly, not daring to turn and provoke the inundation. "I am set-

ting out some plants. I almost wish I might confess to burglarious intentions: it would not seem so frightfully officious—and embarrassing."

The silveriness of the full moon made the place as bright as day.

"These are spice pinks," he said, standing erect and indicating the plants at his feet. "I heard you wish for some. Perhaps I had better tell you of old Isum's betrayal to explain matters."

He gave such a ludicrous account of the contest between Isum and himself that Penelope found herself laughing. He ended by introducing himself. "I am John Lawrence."

Penelope gave a little gasp and looked directly at the frank, humorous eyes, the determined chin, the bigness and quiet strength of him.

"Yes, of course you are," she said with a sigh of relief.

She was young and unconventional, and she was unaware of the absolute satisfaction of her voice; but it thrilled Lawrence to the depths of his being, and gave him a salutary sense of unworthiness.

"Are you Aladdin, to have pinks and pansies when a neighbor chances to wish for them?"

"Not Aladdin, but a gardener." Then with swift plotting, "Come and see my garden! It's the hour and the season when it is most beautiful. It is barely ten o'clock. You have never suspected, most arrogant young gardener, that anybody else could have one too."

Penelope hesitated and was lost. "How could I get over, even if I were willing to go?"

"At the end of the wall the ivy roots make a regular ladder."

"I really ought not to go; but I wonder how it looks?"

A minute later two strong arms swung her over to the other side.

Penelope, to whom speech was wont to come readily, felt as if the gracious Silence laid a fingertip on her lips. She had the strangest sense of homecoming, as Lawrence drew her arm through his to lead her along ways of sheer delight. The spicy fragrance of yellow jasmin was like the soft first breath of spring. Flowering hedges of goldenbell and snow garland spiraea made the winding walks beautiful, and in the borders glimmered the countless stars of the poet's narcissus. Through a path where dogwoods and red buds interlaced overhead, their flower-laden branches of white and pink gleaming in the moonlight, Lawrence led her to the sunken garden. The cool drip of a fountain mingled with the note of an

"How Shall I Tell Anna of This Madness?"



awakened mockingbird. He felt her tremble, and he broke the spell of the sweet [silence] by quoting gently:

"A garden is a lovable thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Fern'd grot—
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contents that God is not—"

"Alas, poor Eve!" she sighed. "I never before understood the bitterness of her banishment. When the dust of the highway blinded her eyes, how they must have yearned for the lost vision of Eden."

He drew her to a seat on a stone bench. "My mother used to sit here," he said. "From my earliest boyhood I used to work out here with her, even when I was so small that I must have hindered our old gardener more than I helped. I'm an awkward fellow at games; so I take my exercise here. I like to handle the very plants she handled. I feel as if the beauty of the garden is the heritage of her exquisite spirit."

With an indrawn breath as if in wonder at himself, he continued, "In the years since her death, I have never once mentioned her name. It is good to be able to talk of her again. In her garden, which shall be yours, every

week brings its changes. While you were away there were the daffodils, big golden ones, and in a fortnight or so the roses will be in bloom. The place seems like a great rosarium then. Later, hollyhocks, foxgloves, Canterbury bells, and all the sturdy perennials and biennials peep out from nooks and corners one has overlooked before. There is a time when the June garden reflects the June skies: tall English delphiniums in every shade of blue bloom against the wall, and there's a lovely azure Japanese iris, and old-fashioned cornflowers and larkspurs. Perhaps together we shall succeed with the gentians I have coaxed in vain. Here around the fountain it is always white, so that none of the charm may be lost at night. That wide border holds many secrets; peonies, Candidum lilies, Japanese anemones, and many other white flowers bloom in turn. One learns to look for their coming as for the visits of old friends. You will love them, won't you, Penelope?"

"Yes." She barely breathed the word, and rose as if to flee from the enchantment that was making all the world outside the garden an unreal place. She flitted before him down the moonlit path, until they reached the vine-covered arbor near the wall.

"It is here I paint in summer," he said. "It was working here that I first heard your voice, in which child and woman and flute and bird are inextricably blended. I was afraid to see you, Dear—think of my being afraid that golden voice could belie you! I thought, 'She must be compounded of primal things; of day and night, eyes like the color of the sky at noon, and hair of a soft darkness like a moonless night.' The wonder of your mouth eluded me; but I guessed the color of your eyes and hair right," he triumphed like a boy.

"If I had golden hair of noon and black eyes of night, wouldn't it have done just as well?" she mocked, with a flash of her old mischief.

"Never! I should have broken my brushes and laid waste my garden: my lonely garden that has waited for you so long."

"But Anna's garden," she ventured, "I must not desert that."

"No, we'll have it a blaze of color another year. It's

a sunshiny spot, and annuals will be delightful there. We'll plan and plant it together, and cut a gate in the wall, if you like."

"Am I unwomanly," she whispered, "in not making even a protest when you plan the future with such quiet confidence?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" he murmured, his face against her hair. "The blessed woman soul of you that meets my solitary one without disguise, without pretense, that recognizes me as your mate and knows it would be beneath the dignity of us both for you to put me first through a probation of torture!"

From the town hall tower a clock struck each of its twelve notes insistently, maliciously.

"I must go. The hour has come when Cinderella's fairy coach—ah, where is it taking me?—may turn into a pumpkin again. No, you mustn't come over the wall with me." As if facing her everyday life again, she added, "How shall I tell Anna of this madness?"

"When she knows that you have pledged the priceless treasure of your life to a 'slovenly artist'—"

"I think she will say, 'Good gracious, Pency!'"

They laughed together like children, and with the face of one who sees his dreams come true he bent to the flowerlike sweetness of her lips.